



**Committee on
Homeland Security Democrats
Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member**

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FEMA Website Is Put to the Test and Fails

WASHINGTON – Today, Democratic staffers of the House Homeland Security Committee tested the performance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) website to determine how effective and informative the site is to those who may need to apply for assistance online.

Hurricane Katrina, which impacted the Gulf Coast states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida, last week; has displaced several hundred thousand residents, who are now looking to FEMA and other federal agencies for help. Secretary Michael Chertoff, head of The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FEMA's Director, Michael Brown, have instructed residents who have had homes destroyed by Katrina to log on to www.fema.gov to file for disaster assistance.

In our test, filing for a disaster on FEMA's website posed some challenges. For starters, there is a security code applicants must type in order to even begin the application process. The letters are scrambled and distorted for security reasons. But this item was difficult for staffers to read, raising the question of how senior citizens and visually impaired persons would be able to insert the correct code. FEMA's online application process has several lengthy pages, and the site tended to freeze up while in the process. At times, the application site did not even upload correctly, forcing the applicant to start over again.

"This website serves no meaningful purpose to those who have been affected by this storm," said Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member, House Committee on Homeland Security. "Many of the affected individuals are now living in shelters where there are no computers for them to log on to. A good number of the storm victims have never even logged on to the Internet, which makes the process even more stressful if they are able to get to a computer. Secretary Chertoff's and Mike Brown's entire thinking on this process is completely warped. A change must come."

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